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SUBJECT: VISIT TO NASARAWA STATE

REF: ABUJA 2080

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1. (U) Summary: Nasarawa has only been a state for seven years, and the governor is working to create a state identity and legacy for himself. Poloff traveled to the capital, Lafia, to visit the PDP Governor, the Nasarawa ANPP chairman and journalists; the meetings all implied that disputes over the contested 2003 election are considered moot and everyone is looking to the future. Nasarawa has few real power brokers besides the governor, and he maintains a balance by insuring that positions are spread among the geographical regions and ethnic groups of the state. Governor Adamu is a smooth politician who appears to be maneuvering for a future national level position. End Summary.

Governor Abdullahi Adamu

2. (SBU) Governor Abdullahi Adamu is 57 years old and started out in the civil service. After his civil engineering degree proved useless under successive military regimes not concerned with public amenities, Adamu turned to law. He studied in Nigeria and after passing the bar also went into politics. He was Plateau State chairman of the old Social Democratic Party (SDP - at one time the ruling party at the national level), and he was imprisoned briefly during Buhari's military regime. Adamu was a drafter of both the 1977/78 and the 1994/95 constitutions. He is a Muslim and was born in Keffi (then in Plateau State, now in the western part of Nasarawa).

3. (SBU) Adamu is very polished, and a politician to the core. He is reticent to discuss other individuals in power, preferring to discuss general party politics. He is very ambitious; the belief on the street is that he is maneuvering for a national-level position. He thinks highly of himself and his skills and is more than happy to discuss his qualifications. Adamu's office is filled with personal portraits, pictures and oversized greeting cards. He is well groomed, expensively dressed, and eloquent; he speaks softly and to the point.

First four and a half years

4. (U) Nasarawa State was created in 1997 by Abacha to reduce the size and importance of Plateau State. The state immediately became one of the poorest in the federation, as it does not benefit from the quality of soil and climate that the more northern Plateau State has for agriculture. Infrastructure is very poor, and the capital, Lafia, is little more than a small market town. Faced with numerous problems throughout the state, Adamu began many ambitious projects to repair roads, build public structures, provide rural electricity and water, and improve education. Most of these projects have faltered along the way and run out of money. Governor Adamu's only real success is in the education sector, in the creation of a handful of good quality secondary schools and universities. Despite numerous complaints that his administration never finished anything, Adamu was reelected in April amidst allegations of rigging.

Future Goals

5. (U) Adamu believes the way forward lies in manufacturing. He stated that Nasarawa cannot compete in agriculture and therefore he has pretty much scrapped any state government assistance to that sector. His goal in his second term is to attract a few outside investors and try to build a number of factories. He complained that Nasarawa is either last or next to last in money received from the Federal Revenue Allocation, and therefore is looking for ways to increase state government revenue.

Akwanga and the Nomination Process

6. (U) The PDP Governor was reticent about discussing the

detention of Labor Minister Husseini Akwanga (reftel), whom Adamu pushed for the national cabinet. Poloff asked about how the governor groomed proteges and colleagues for state and national office. Apparently, ethnic and regional balances play roles not only at the national level, but also within the state. Governor Adamu pointed out that while he is from the western part of the state, his new Deputy Governor and the Chief Judge are both from the central area, and the Speaker of the State House of Assembly is from the east. Adamu stated that he would choose three persons to nominate from each of the three senatorial districts for national positions, and then ask the President to select one. Adamu appeared to be more concerned with leadership qualities in local communities (i.e. amount of votes a person can swing) in his selections than with party faithful.

17. (U) Governor Adamu's first deputy governor was offered a position in the cabinet, and Adamu replaced him with a university professor in the hopes of assisting in the state-building process. As Adamu was already in position, he did not have to concern himself with the votes his deputy could bring. For the 2003 election, it was necessary to find a running mate who could bring in votes from a different area of the state, and therefore the governor dropped his incumbent.

National Issues

18. (U) Governor Adamu pointed out that 26 of 36 governors will be ineligible to run in 2007, having served the maximum two elected terms. While he believes that there will not be a movement to remove term limits, he was concerned about that numerous powerful men would soon be looking for something else to do. Adamu believes the term limit issue is the driving force behind early campaigning for 2007, as many governors are competing for the Vice Presidential ticket. Another problem with term limits is a constant need to reinvent the wheel in Nigerian governance, Adamu claimed. Democracy in Nigeria is too new, he thought, and it will take a much longer time period for politicians to better understand the process they've created and to deliver promised reforms to the populace.

19. (U) Adamu echoed his PDP's party line on Nigeria's national politics. He claimed that if Obasanjo had not been reelected in 2003, the experiment in democracy would have failed. Adamu said four years were too short a period in this country to address the multitude of things that have to be reformed. Without the continuity provided by Obasanjo, the presidency would have devolved into a completely ineffectual revolving door. In reality, according to Adamu, the 2007 election will be the real test of democracy in Nigeria and will demonstrate whether this country can truly sustain a transition. In addition, Adamu believes that the PDP has a responsibility that goes with their overwhelming majority to make sweeping reforms in Nigeria (although he did not get into specifics) and that the party will not deserve the presidency in 2007 if it cannot fix the country now.

Meeting with the ANPP Chairman

110. (SBU) Nasarawa ANPP Chairman Umaru was a senator with the SDP from 1992 to 1997 in Plateau State, during which time his district was the current Nasarawa State. Then he served in the new Nasarawa State Assembly until 1999. According to Umaru, the ANPP in Nasarawa has already given up on the current electoral tribunal process and are looking to 2007. He stated that the major obstacle today is the apathy of the populace; after what he termed the obvious rigging of the April 12 National Assembly elections, people no longer cared about subsequent elections. Umaru claimed that Governor Adamu did not even campaign for the 2003 election, and was even chased out of some villages. He also claimed that Adamu's successes in education would continue to promulgate the ruling party as costs for higher education in state have become so prohibitive that only persons with access to government coffers and contracts will be able to send their children to these schools. He also mentioned problems between the ANPP National Secretariat and the state chapters, as the National Secretariat still has not yet passed 2003 election funds to the state chapters.

Meeting with Journalists

111. (SBU) Poloff met with National Union of Journalists State Chairman Musa Abdullahi and the state reporter for Radio Nigeria. While the two men have somewhat opposing views on the ruling party, both agreed that Governor Adamu is okay. They stated that he has many good ideas for projects to improve infrastructure, but that all the projects seem to stop midstream. The major complaint against the Governor is that he has not seen any projects through to completion. Both journalists were also certain of the Governor's higher

aspirations. On the issue of the Akwanga detention (reftel), the journalists felt that the situation demonstrated President Obasanjo's commitment to fighting corruption. Even though both agreed that the arrests were probably timed to impress Obasanjo's Commonwealth Heads of Government peers, the main issue was that the GON had finally investigated someone at the cabinet level.

Roberts